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NSC BRIEFING

8 June 1954

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THE DETERIORATING SITUATION IN SYRIA

I. The governmental ineffectiveness

A. Weak caretaker cabinet

1. Unable set date for promised parliamentary elections.

Last suggested date sometime in August, now also
uncertain.

2. Frequently reported seriously split, on verge of resigning in favor of another interim cabinet.

B. Major political parties--Nationalists and Populists--are pulling apart even though still collaborating in caretaker cabinet.

1. Neither party would seem to be able win decisive electoral victory.

2. Can't agree on common program and slate of candidates.

3. Even if they did, it would be a fragile coalition.

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II. Possibility of a coup

**A. Politicians' failures increase possibility of a leftist--
military or straight military coup.**

**1. Chief danger from Akram Hawrani, radical socialist, and
his military partisans--variously numbered at 300-400
army officers out of estimated 2,000.**

**(a) Reportedly vetoed suggested military coup 17 May
because of unfavorable circumstances.**

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**2. Another threat: straight military coup as result of army
dissatisfaction over civilian effort to control it.**

**(a) Assistant Chief of Staff Malki, popular and
influential officer, considered threat; threatened
defense minister with "consequences" if "touched" or
sent out of country. Malki allegedly supporter of
Hawrani.**

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(b) Captain Hamdu, who played major role overthrew of Shishakli, involved in mid-March abortive coup and made 17 May suggestion to Hawrani might act on own as well as with Hawrani.

(c) Armored brigade commander Colonel Assaf frequently involved in plots.

III. Outlook

A. Immediate possibility of a successful coup cannot be discounted. However, army leaders appear badly split. We really know little about various military leaders and their current ambitions and plans.

B. More likely, the situation will continue deteriorate until increased unpopularity of civilian government gives reins to extremists and military.

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